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Elliott, Howard

Remarks at Middlebury  
College...commencement

[Middlebury, Vt.]

[1916]

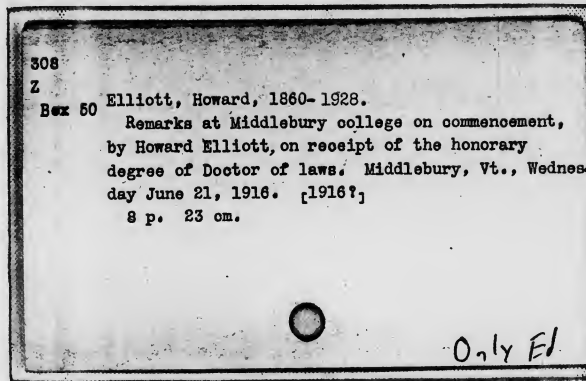
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REMARKS  
AT  
MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE  
ON  
COMMENCEMENT  
BY  
HOWARD ELLIOTT

On Receipt of the Honorary Degree  
of Doctor of Laws

Middlebury, Vt.,  
Wednesday, June 21, 1916

Ms. A. 9.2.5.17

I wish to express my profound thanks to the Trustees of Middlebury College for the honor conferred on me to-day by this, the oldest college in the beautiful Green Mountain State.

Founded in 1800, Middlebury is not so old, nor so large, as that college which, until to-day, was the only one to claim my loyal allegiance,—Harvard. I am a great believer in the usefulness of the smaller colleges located at a distance from congested centers of population, and near to Mother Earth. We all remember the story of Antaeus, who was so strong that he conquered all who came against him,—how his strength came from Mother Earth, and how Hercules finally overcame him when he lifted him from off the earth and thus prevented him from renewing his strength; and so it is important to get back to Nature if we are to keep up the virility of the American people.

In 1800, when this college was founded, Harvard, founded in 1636, had a faculty of 12, and there were 210 students, while Yale, founded in 1701, had a teaching staff of 11 and 217 students. In 1850 there were at Harvard 32 instructors and 604 students, and at Yale 43 instructors and 531 students.

Middlebury's catalogue for the year just ending shows 43 names in the teaching and administrative staffs, 343 undergraduates from 12 states, and foreign countries, and 149 attending the summer school,—a total of 492. Middlebury is showing a rational growth.

The earlier colleges in New England trained men to take a large part in shaping the future history of the United States. The influence of Harvard and Yale, 100 years ago, was important and far-reaching, and they did great work with endowments, teaching staffs and facilities which seem meagre compared with the elaborate organizations of some of the great universities to-day, both private and state.

In a recent edition of "Who's Who in America," 20 per cent. of the names mentioned were men born in New England, and Vermont has a large share of illustrious names.

The high character of Middlebury graduates is shown by the fact that in its first 100 years among its graduates were 32 college Presidents, and 9 Governors of states.

Never was there greater need than to-day for men of the type turned out by the hard training of 50, 100 and 200 years ago.

"We live in great times—the air is all athrob with thought and feeling. Great times are now being brought about, and never was there a time when men of steady judgment were more in demand."

That is very true. The conflict on the other side of the water,—after the physical struggle is over,—will leave conditions the result of which no man can accurately foretell. But it must be admitted that there is likely to be a very serious readjustment of society and Government and of the relations of individuals and races—also that this readjustment is certain to have its effect on this country. It is, therefore, well for those who have the welfare of the nation at heart to use their influence in preparing for the future.

The Nation's Growth. Since 1870 the nation has been passing through a remarkable period of expansion and exploitation. What do the figures show?

Population	1870...	38,558,371
	1916...	100,000,000
National Wealth	1870...	\$ 30,068,518,000
	1912...	\$187,739,071,000
Miles of Railroad	1870...	52,922
	1910...	249,992
Total Individual Bank Deposits	1870...	\$ 2,182,512,744
	1910...	\$17,024,067,607
Imports	1870...	\$ 435,958,408
	1914...	\$ 1,893,925,657
Exports	1870...	\$ 392,771,768
	1914...	\$ 2,364,579,148

The total number of immigrants arriving in this country from 1870 to 1910 inclusive was 20,698,610, or an average of 517,465 a year; oftentimes more than a million a year arrived.

These figures show enormous growth and wealth far beyond the dreams of our citizens before the Civil War. With this increased wealth have come greater comfort and health for the poor, the moderately well off, and all. We see the result on every side,—better types of dwellings, better sanitation, better railroad service, better lights, greater attention to the sick and poor. Yet, we have not succeeded in eliminating discontent and unrest, and we seem to have lost some of the marked and desirable characteristics of our forefathers.

To accomplish the results of the last fifty years tireless energy and prodigious work were necessary,—work to plan, work to execute. Because of the apparently unlimited natural resources of our country and the great immigration, we have not thought sufficiently of conditions that will confront us when we are compelled to husband our resources in order to compete with other nations. These conditions now face us. We surely can help ourselves if we try to practice the old-fashioned characteristics that many are pleased to call New England habits. These characteristics and habits are not as prevalent as in the old days,—traits that built up the country from the Revolution to the Civil War, and which I am glad to know Middlebury College encourages.

As your catalogue points out, the location of the college favors economy,—a sterling habit that seems to be lost sight of in this period of extravagance, due, doubtless, to the great increase in wealth. We are extravagant as individuals, and our Government,—Federal, State, municipal, and county,—reflects that spirit. As a result, we are piling up debts that will be a burden upon many a county and town, and the state and nation for years to come.

I am engaged in the business of transportation,—one of about 1,800,000 people employed in the United States in that important work.

Middlebury's gifted poet, John Godfrey Saxe, born 100 years ago, in his "Rhyme of the Rail," speaks of the humanizing effect of the railroad:

"Men of different stations,  
In the eye of Fame,  
Here are very quickly  
Coming to the same.  
High and lowly people,  
Birds of every feather  
On a common level,  
Traveling together."

Suppose each man in the service could save only one cent a day. It would amount to \$5,400,000 a year. That saving would help to provide additional facilities which are sorely needed in many parts of the country. Numerous other simple examples could be given of the importance of economy and the practice of old-fashioned New England thrift.

The college in the country has a direct influence for sane and economical living which is an offset to the extravagance of the great cities.

**We Must**      There is another habit that is not so  
**Work! Work!**      prevalent as formerly—the habit of  
**Work!**      work. Those who made the American  
                 nation what it is to-day worked long  
and hard. The spirit of hard work now seems to be  
lacking and we hear constantly that eight hours or less  
work a day is all that a strong, healthy man should do.  
Where would the United States now be if our fore-  
fathers had been content with eight hours' work a day?  
Where will the United States be in the race for future  
commercial supremacy among the nations if this spirit  
continues? We have ships to build, railroads to develop,  
an army and navy to be manned, and countless tasks to  
perform. Every patriotic man should give the best that  
is in him, not the least, if we are to avoid serious diffi-  
culties at home and abroad.

Then there was the old-fashioned habit of prompt obedience to lawful authority. Some of the commercial, financial and industrial difficulties of recent years can be traced to the fact that daring and ambitious men did not pay attention to the laws, man-made, and nature-made. We cry out against industrial accidents and blame the corporations, and yet a large proportion of all accidents are traceable directly to failure to obey lawful authority.

I recently received a report from the Interstate Commerce Commission about the accidents on the New Haven Road since 1911. All in which there were fatalities to passengers, the report said, were due to the failure of some man or men to obey the rules. These men were good average men and did not mean to disobey the rules, and did not mean to cause accidents, but the result indicates that the spirit of complete and prompt obedience to lawful authority is not as prevalent as it should be.

**Ease,**  
**Luxury and**  
**Extravagance.**

The great growth of the nation, the increased wealth, the luxury and extravagance, the ease of living, and the desire for amusement have made some of the old-fashioned, sterling characteristics and habits seem less necessary and desirable to the present generation. Yet, if we are to prepare properly for the future, we must pay attention to these simple, homely qualities and train young men and women to believe in them.

Without **character**, high sense of **duty** and willingness to **work long and hard**, all the "Preparedness" parades and meetings will be of little avail.

I sincerely believe that in a serious crisis the American people would, in time, rise to any emergency, but it would be far better if the daily lives, the manners and customs of the people were so adjusted that a serious crisis should not be necessary to arouse the people to their full duty to the country, individually, socially and politically.

Oliver Goldsmith said:

"Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates and men decay;  
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade;  
A breath can make them as a breath has made;  
But a bold peasantry—their country's pride,  
When once destroyed can never be supplied."

Wealth has accumulated in the United States to a marvelous extent. It has brought much good and some harm to those who have not the moral fibre to differentiate between good and evil. And there has been too great drift away from the country to the city.

#### COLLEGE INFLUENCE.

The college in the country is furnishing each year graduates, both men and women, who go out into our national life trained in some of these good, old-fashioned doctrines of self-denial, economy, thrift, willingness to work and obedience to lawful authority and a high sense of duty. Such men and women help to correct slothful and selfish tendencies.

And so, while I believe in and appreciate very much the splendid work that has been done and is being done, and the great opportunities offered by the larger universities, I also feel that in our national life there is abundant opportunity for the so-called smaller colleges to create strong characters, men and women, who will be most important factors in the very difficult work this country must perform in the next twenty-five years under the new and changed economic conditions which confront all the world.

**END OF  
TITLE**